

Ellen O’Kane Tauscher

1951–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

DEMOCRAT FROM CALIFORNIA

1997–



Image courtesy of the Member

A WOMAN PIONEER ON THE NEW YORK STOCK EXCHANGE, Ellen Tauscher used her Wall Street business experience and negotiating skills to become a prominent Democratic centrist in the U.S. House. Representing a suburban California district east of the Bay Area, Congresswoman Tauscher has developed an expertise in national security issues from her seat on the Armed Services Committee.

Ellen O’Kane was born in Newark, New Jersey, on November 15, 1951. The daughter of a grocery store owner, she earned a B.A. in early childhood education from Seton Hall University in 1974. In her mid-20s, she became one of the first women to hold a seat on the New York Stock Exchange, serving there from 1977 to 1979. During her 14-year Wall Street career she also served as an officer of the American Stock Exchange. In 1989, she married William Tauscher and raised a daughter, Katherine. The couple later divorced. In 1992, Ellen Tauscher founded a service for pre-employment screening of childcare providers. She later authored *The Child Care Source Book*. She also created the Tauscher Foundation, which donated \$200,000 to California and Texas schools to buy computer equipment for elementary education. Tauscher received her first political experience serving as the state co-chair for Dianne Feinstein’s successful 1992 and 1994 Senate campaigns.

In 1996, Tauscher challenged incumbent California Republican Bill Baker in a newly created delta district comprising bedroom communities that are the most conservative in the Bay Area. Tauscher ran on a platform of gun control, women’s right to abortion, and increased spending on education, along with the reduction of wasteful fiscal spending. She narrowly won, with 49 percent to Baker’s 47 percent, in a race with three minor-party candidates. “My message throughout this campaign was one of moderation and common sense,” Tauscher declared afterwards. “I want to go back to Washington and stand in the middle . . . where most Americans stand.”¹ In the next two elections, Tauscher won slightly more comfortable margins over GOP candidates, defeating Charles Ball 53 to 43 percent and Claude Hutchison 52 to 44 percent.²

When Tauscher took her seat in the 105th Congress (1997–1999), she received assignments on three committees: National Security (later renamed Armed Services), Science, and Transportation and Infrastructure. In the 106th Congress (1999–2001), Tauscher resigned her Science Committee seat to focus on her two other assignments.

Tauscher's committee assignments provided her a national platform from which she also was able to serve district needs. As a member of the Armed Services Committee, Tauscher outlined an activist role for America in the international arena. In the spring of 1999, when the William J. Clinton administration coordinated NATO air attacks against Serbia for its invasion of Kosovo and "ethnic cleansing" of the populace, Tauscher insisted that ground troops be sent.³ In the 108th Congress (2003–2005), Tauscher played a vocal role in the Iraq War, calling for additional troops and equipment, and visiting the region four times. Her district is the only one which holds two national defense laboratories—Lawrence Livermore and Sandia/California. She secured nearly \$200 million in funding for Livermore's "super laser" project. Tauscher also has a prominent role as the senior Democrat on the congressional panel overseeing the National Nuclear Security Administration, which manages the U.S. nuclear weapons program. From her seat on Transportation and Infrastructure, Tauscher steered federal funding to improve the Bay Area's badly strained transportation systems, including \$33 million for projects in her district.

Tauscher was a vocal supporter of cutting taxes, especially the "marriage penalty" and the estate tax, and she voted to override President Clinton's 2000 veto of an estate tax repeal. She did not support Republican proposals in the 106th Congress to slash taxes by almost \$800 billion and also opposed the 2001 tax cut proposed by the George W. Bush administration and passed by Congress.⁴ Her alternative plan of tax cuts, "triggered" only after surplus money was confirmed, became the Democratic alternative to the \$1.6 trillion cut proposed by the GOP.⁵

In 1998, *Time* magazine dubbed her moderate Democratic approach to politics "Tauscherism," a kind of middle-of-the road politics that blended fiscal conservatism with social liberalism.⁶ "Tauscherism" also reflected the political realities of her suburban district which, until reapportionment in 2002, was more Republican than Democratic. When the lines were redrawn by the California legislature, Tauscher easily won election to a fourth term, with 75 percent of the vote against Libertarian candidate Sonia Harden. In 2004, Tauscher won re-election with 66 percent of the vote against Republican Jeff Ketelson.⁷

FOR FURTHER READING

Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, "Ellen O'Kane Tauscher," <http://bioguide.congress.gov>

Tauscher, Ellen O., with Kathleen Candy. *The Child Care Sourcebook* (New York: Macmillan, 1996).

NOTES

1 Barry Witt, "Race Seen as Bellwether of House Control; District 10 House Race: GOP-DEMO Bellwether," 16 October 1996, *San Jose Mercury News*: 1A; John Wildermuth and Jim Doyle, "Tauscher Beats Baker in an Upset; Big Bay Area Surprise in Race for Congress," 7 November 1996, *San Francisco Chronicle*: A17; Erin Hallissy, "East Bay Congressman Focuses on Rival's Wealth; Ads Claim Challenger Is Trying to Buy Seat," 1 October 1996, *San Francisco Chronicle*: A1.

2 "Elections Statistics, 1920 to Present," <http://clerk.house.gov/members/electionInfo/elections.html>.

3 Christopher Heredia, "Tauscher to Urge Ground Troops on Congressional Visit to Balkans," 7 April 1999, *San Francisco Chronicle*: A22.

4 *Politics in America*, 2002 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2001): 85.

5 Marc Sandalow, "Ellen Tauscher: Movin' on Up," 1 March 2001, *California Journal*.

6 Peter Beinart, "Why the Center Can't Hold," 24 November 1997, *Time*; online at <http://www.time.com/time/archive/preview/0,10987,1101971124-136899,00.html> (accessed 7 December 2004); Mary Anne Ostrom, "Tauscher Typifies Demos' Visions," 31 March 1998, *Mercury News*: 1A.

7 "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present," <http://clerk.house.gov/members/electionInfo/elections.html>.